

I do not understand why the FCC announcements about possible changes in media ownership rules were not more widely broadcast. It is only recently that much has been heard about this process. We are facing rule changes that can greatly alter the way media operates in this country, with all that such changes imply for the working of our democracy, yet there was little public notice. Such profound changes deserve open, honest, clear, and complete public discussion, with public access to all the relevant facts.

The FCC and the rules were set up to benefit and protect the public. Yet there is little information available to the public. The FCC announcements were vague and poorly publicized. When changes of this magnitude are being contemplated why not require television networks to make repeated announcements during regular news programs over a period of a month or more, so that all members of the public know what is going on? For a long while the only network news announcement of these rule changes was one report on ABC at 4:40 in the morning. That is shocking and should be considered a national scandal. If the FCC exists to protect the public and has the authority to regulate broadcasting, then it should use its authority to make sure, through the broadcasters it regulates, that the public knows what is going on.

The information used by the FCC to arrive at recommendations does not seem to be available to the public. Yet the FCC is a public institution, set up to help the public. Few public hearings were held on the subject. There are complaints from some citizens that the FCC does not take the desires of citizens seriously, that only the desires of corporations are taken into consideration. It has been said that industry lobbyists have easy access to the staff and commissioners of the FCC, but citizens have little access. Is that the way things should be in a democracy?

The public and other interested parties deserve the right to comment on any rule changes. To comment effectively the public needs to know what rule changes are being contemplated. How can the citizens of a democracy participate in meaningful ways to discussions of rule changes if they do not know what might be changed and what changes are being proposed?

There are reports that the information used by the FCC was obtained from industry sources, that the FCC does not even use its own independent methods of gathering information. How is the FCC going to assure the public, for whom it works, that the information it bases its decisions on is accurate and complete if it does not independently collect the information?

I think more complete public discussion is necessary before any changes are made in media rules. The public needs to know all the facts and all of the proposed changes, and have meaningful opportunities to respond, before any decisions are made. Let us keep and enforce the present rules until there has been a proper public discussion, with full public availability of and access to the information on this issue. If you consider rule changes necessary, publish the proposed changes with supporting reasons, including the full information used by you to reach your conclusions, then let the public and our elected representatives consider, discuss, and render opinions before any decision is made to put the changes into effect.